

The Athenian Mercury:

Tuesday, February 28. 1693



Quest. 1. **T**he Gazette gives us a very terrible Relation of the late Earthquakes in Sicily, which every body supposes to be the effect of the razing of Mount Aetna: Pray what account can you give of that Mountain?

Ans. Some of the most probable Causes of Earthquakes we have given in our former Mercuries. As to this Mountain *Aetna*, it has made several Eruptions: 'Tis said, that when it first burst out, it astonished the World, by raising a Pillar of Smoke and Fire, which cast out Sciarri or Cinders night and day with horrid roarings. It obscured the Sun and Stars, in so much that the People thereabout thought the Prophecie of *Joel*, and that of *St. Matthew*, viz. *There shall be signs in Sun and Moon*, were accomplished, and that the end of the World drew near. *Pliny*, (as its related) to be better informed, perished by his Curiosity in drawing nigh to inspect it. This Mountain rises from the very Sea-shore, the shortest passage to its top is reckoned 20 miles, tho' from *Catania* it is about 30 miles, it makes a fair prospect to the Passengers at Sea to the Eastward. The old mouth of this Mountain rag'd 2 or three months together, with Concussions of the Earth eighteen days, when at last it sunk down into its own bowels, but the 11th. of *March*, 1669. two hours before night it burst out about 20 miles beneath the old mouth, 10 miles from *Catania*. The stream was thought to be liquified Minerals and Metallic Matters, boyling, which gush'd forth like Water from the head of some great River, spreading it self into several Streams or Channels, its Motion was direct, burning up whatever was Combustible in its way; but if Bank, Wall, or Building stop'd it, then it swell'd up till it either forced the Building down, or rose so high, that it run over it in its greatest Violence; its motion was so slow, that the Inhabitants had time to carry off whatever was of value. At the mouth issued Fire, Smoak and Ashes, with continued noise like Thunder, or Waves of the Sea, which was heard a 100 miles distance; the Ashes, and Sciarri or Cinders were disperfed as far, for the fires continued issuing from the mouth 54 days, and the pillar of Ashes and Smoak that ascended in a streight body out of the Vorago, or mouth, exceeded twice the bigness of *Pauls* Steeple, that neither Sun nor Moon nor Stars were seen in all that time in that part. The Cinder-stones were a dusky blew, the outward part of this burning stream was soon cold, and crusted, and in its utmost fury did bear people upon it, tho' the melted matter streamed under, which ran a miles length into the Sea, and as much in Front, from the beginning to the end, not much unlike the River of *Thames* in a great Frost at the top of the Ice, lying much after such a rugged manner. Three quarters of the City *Catania*, and the whole Countrey, from the Walls of this City to 20 miles this side, are full of this Sciarri, which become mollified by time, and the ground very fertile. The major part of this Relation was sent by several inquisitive Merchants to the Royal Society.

Quest. 2. Divers Persons in the County of *Kent* being accused for Practising Witchcraft, were examined by a Justice of Peace, from whom I had a Copy of their Examinations and Confessions.

T—*n* S—*ll* of D—*ton*, Widdow, being Examined June the 29th. 1692. did Confess that she had made a Covenant with the Devil in Writing, and signed it with her Blood which dropt from her Nose; that she had four Imps, whom she called by the Names of *Vene*, *Harry*, *George* and *William*; three of them were black, and about the bigness of Mice, they suckt her every third Night; but *William* was like a little black

Man, he talkt to her, and had Carnal Copulation with her twice; that by the help of these she did Mischief to Beasts and Men, of which she gave divers Instances.

She Confess'd the same to many, and to the Minister of the Parish, desiring him to Pray for her, and declaring that she was sorry for what she had done: She went on Confessing to the last: But five days before the Assizes she was found dead by her Bed-side in a strange Posture.

Another did upon Examination Confess that she had Imps from an Old Man and his Wife, vvhhen she vvas about Eighteen Years of Age, of vvhich she told a very exact Story; that by these she had done hurt, particularly about five Weeks ago, she and another of her Companions went by Night in the shape of two Cats, into the Chamber of one whom she named, through a Hole in the Window, and finding him in Bed upon his Back, vvvith his Mouth open, they poured black Stuff vvhich they carried vvvith them into his Mouth, and vvvithin a little time after he dyed: A Gentlewoman then present, told me, she spake thus to her, *Woman, you do Confess impossible things, as that you can turn your selves into Cats, and go through the Hole of a Window, it cannot be; to vvhich she Confidently replied, We can do it, and have done it.*

A third Woman did Confess that she had been a Witch upvvards of Fifty Years, that she had two little things like Mice that suckt her, but she never hurt any Body, except only one Child.

When the two latter came upon their Tryal, they denyed all that they had spoken, and there being no other material Evidence against them but their ovvn Confessions, were acquitted.

It was likewise declared at the same time upon Oath, that some suspected Persons having voluntarily offered themselves to be Sworn, to clear themselves of the Scandal of Witchcraft: They were flung bound into the Water three times apiece, but could not sink, though they lay a considerable while upon the Water: One of these (a young Man) said, if he were unbound, then he was sure he should sink; they loosed him, and flung him in again, but he swam higher than before, even like a blovv'n Bladder, and rolled upon the Water as if it had been down a dry Bank.

I am likewise Credibly Informed, that to make an Experiment, they hired a Fellow then present for 5 s. to be flung in bound after the same manner, who sunk presently to the bottom, and before they could get him ashoar, had taken a great deal of Water into his Belly.

Gentlemen,

These things are disbeliev'd and ridiculed, not only by our young Pretenders to Wit, but by Persons of greater Sense and Sobriety. I desire your Judgment upon these three Questions:

1. *Is it likely that all these should be the Effect of Dotage, Melancholly, or a disturbed Imagination?*
2. *If they be realities, what Philosophical Account can be given of them? particularly the sucking of Imps, their turning themselves into Cats, and not being able to sink?*
3. *Is it lawfull to attempt the Discovery of Witches by Swimming, and how far is it an Evidence against them?*

Ans. 1. To the first We Answer, that 'tis not for us to give our Judgment against that of the Court, who were very likely to have a more particular Account of every thing relating to the Tryals than we can now possibly have, and if they saw no reason to Condemn the Accused, We see none, under lesser Advantages, and believe there might be Melancholly, Dotage, &c. in the Case, tho' we are not by any means so incredulous, as

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to believe there is no such thing as a *Witch* in Nature, who by the help of the Devil can Act many things unaccountable by any Divines or Philosophers in the World.

2. To the second, We can't tell what to think of those things that are call'd Imps, tho' 'tis certain there are also such, and many Witches have dy'd Confessing it; 'tis probable they are nothing else but Devils, but how the Devil or Spirits can work upon Matter, is yet another Mystery unknown to any one in the World. As for Witches turning themselves into Cats, &c. We can give a better account of, being assur'd from undoubted Authors and Credible Witnesses that 'tis all imposture and Cheat, and that such very Persons as pretend to do such things are in a sort of Swound or Exanimation all the while, as Experiments and Examples testify, and therefore the Devil does by some Means or other so work upon their Fancies and Imaginations, as to make 'em really believe they do such and such things; and as for their Gold, their Dainties, and other suppos'd Enjoyments, 'tis all Fiction and Imposition, for notwithstanding their Presents of Gold, Silver, &c. and their suppos'd Revelling and Feasts, 'tis evident that they are always Poor, and almost starv'd for Necessaries.

3. Such sort of Examination by Svimming, &c. is utterly Unlawful, and a Breach of the sixth Commandment, and as subject to Abuses and Deceits as any other Tryal in Nature; for, suppose the Devil by the Permission of God Almighty has such or such a Person under his Power, and does by his Arts unknown to them, in such a Tryal as Svimming buoy them, will it follow therefore that they are Witches. Nay, if any Person may as well buoy up himself in the Water by Natural Arts, as by certain Oyntments resist the Heat of the Fire, its a very weak Consequence to conclude him guilty of Witchcraft, because a third Person who knows nothing of the Matter, cannot give a Reason for it.

Quest. 3. *What is Happiness?*

Ans. 'Tis not what the World generally supposes, since there are so many disappointed, and the pretences of Mankind in this search, would, to an unconcern'd looker on, argue that Men are Creatures of different Species. 'Twas not without good reason that the Ingenious *Earl of Rochester* in his *Satyr against Man*, towards the end, concludes, that *some men differ more from others than others do from Beasts*; meaning, as is evident by what precedes, that the really pious few that believe and live well, have not only their Pretences but Idea's of things very different from that of other men, whose Souls are immers'd in Sense, and lost in Body. Those that know the World most, are the best Judges of the querulous Dissatisfactions, and universal Disappointments that every one complains of, and with the mystery continues so, altho' it is in every ones power to be happy. — Here is one who promises himself a large share of Felicity, and purchasing such an *Estate*, another this *Preferment*, a third that *Cruel one*, &c. and if by an unwearied industry, or (in respect of us) an adventitious occurrence, the business is accomplish'd, we are yet either where we were, wishing for something else, under the same Impatience, or labouring under the too late Repentance of disappointments: And the reason is evident, for we put false values upon things at a distance, and fix the whole of our inclinations upon unproportional Objects. As no Man smells with his Eyes or Ears, or tries sounds with his Nose; so no Wise man will stamp an unjust Estimate upon the Pleasures of Sense, and the Actions wherein his Body is mostly concern'd. 'Tis the pleasures of a well inform'd Mind, and the reflections of just and vertuous Actions, that gives a Title to what our Querist calls *Happiness*. Every Creature was made for some end, and if this order be inverted, such a Creature is abus'd, or made in vain. The end of man was to Know, Love and Enjoy his Author, and where this Conformity holds, there ensues a Happiness proportionable to the measure of those, and this is what we understand by *Happiness*.

Quest. 4. *What's the meaning of that Text, Put up thy Sword Peter, they that use the Sword shall perish by the Sword?*

Ans. This has troubled the Commentators much; perhaps it is a check to Peter, and a Prophecie, viz. That they, the high Priests of the Jews, who made use of the Roman Magistrates Sword to cut him off, then they should perish by the Sword themselves, which was fulfilled 40 years after Christ's Death, they perishing by the Romans Svord by Titus the Emperor at the destruction of Jerusalem.

Quest. 5. *Whether Bacon is so scarce a Commodity in Spain as reported?*

Ans. At Madrid, the Metropolis of Spain, it is Customary for men to cry thro' the Streets before Dinner, *Savor de Ola, Savor de Ola*, or *A Relish for the Pot, A Relish for the Pot*; those that call him, give him the value of a Farthing, perhaps two or three, to let his piece of Bacon boil in their Pot so long to give a relish, which time expired, he pulls out the Bacon vvith the string, and Budgets it up again, crying *Savor de Ola* again, vvhich may be some Argument that Bacon may be scarce there.

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